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Grandmother Rocker

A Costume Play in One Act

By

TRACY D. MYGATT

*Author of "Bird's Nest," "The Noose," "Children
of Israel," "Good Friday," "Crystal's
Career," and other plays.*

NOTICE

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CHARACTERS

THE BRIDE AND GROOM.
GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.
GRANDFATHER ARMCHAIR.
LOUISA QUINZE.
THE LITTLE CHAIR.
THE LITTLEST CHAIR.
THE FOOTSTOOL BABY.
MRS. POMFUSS.
POLLY.
GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK, AND—UGH!
THE AUCTIONEER.

SCENE.—An old room in an old house.
TIME.—The day they have been dreading.



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meat

To
EILEEN MARY
these first playmates
for
her first-of-all
Birthday

NOTE FOR THE PRODUCER

In the production of "Grandmother Rocker" the direction will undoubtedly vary with the available stage-craft. Though the author feels that the best effect will be gained where it is possible to create the illusion of the characters stepping directly from the pieces of furniture they represent, this identification can be attained through other methods. It is suggested, for instance, that the costumes follow coloring and texture of furniture as closely as possible. Judicious use of inconspicuous screens, especially, perhaps, in the case of GRANDFATHER ARM-CHAIR and GRANDMOTHER ROCKER, will aid in solving the problem. The chief solution, after all, will lie in quick and clever acting, whether this be done by children, as the author would prefer, or by adults. The stage directions in the text are obviously literary and suggestive rather than technical and dogmatic, and the author believes that any ingenious director will work out an effective set.

Grandmother Rocker

ACT I

SCENE.—*A large room, empty except for a good bit of old-fashioned furniture. And let me explain at once that this furniture is so very old-fashioned that unless you care for that kind of thing, you have no right—no matter how much you have bought your ticket, to see this play, and still less to act in it yourself. And if you wonder how you can act in it—seeing that the ARM-CHAIR and the ROCKER, and even the FOOTSTOOL, have just as big print on the program as MRS. POMFUSS and the BRIDE herself,—well, that is the nice part, because the Play is the realest kind of make-believe, and, when you get down to it, Shakespeare himself is only a Play!*

The minute after the curtain is up, the House-keeper—her name is MRS. POMFUSS—comes in through the door, R., and begins to dust. (This is true in all proper plays, except when it is sometimes the Butler.) And as she dusts, she mutters to herself, as they all do, and you want to listen (which is just what she wants you to do), so there you are, safe inside! Also, you want to watch, for just now when she passed the duster over that inlaid table, rather to the centre of the room, the large dark cloth which hangs down all

round it, seemed to jerk a little—not by her fingers!—and there was just the suspicion of a snigger—(the kind of snigger the youngest kindergarten child makes, if you remember)! And yet there is no one about but the Housekeeper, comfortable and fat and dressed in black silk, with a bunch of keys at her waist; and of course the furniture I have mentioned,—a battered mahogany secretary and hautboy to R. and L., rear; the shiny horsehair Sofa with the stuffing coming out, across the back of the room; the Rocker and Armchair in the usual places; a dainty little Louis Quinze chair perked out self-importantly toward the centre. There are a couple of little bits of chairs and a Footstool, all three of the latter jumbled round together near the Sofa, about the Fireplace, which I hope is where it should be, for there is nothing like a Fireplace to make you feel cosy on a chilly December afternoon like this,—the Fireplace, and the Great-Grandfather Clock in the corner beside it. Now whether MRS. POMFUSS heard the snigger, or whether her sudden desire for company is due to pure excitement, I don't know; but she is certainly flustered, and, dropping her duster on the table, she steps to the door, R., and calls.

MRS. POMFUSS.

Polly! Oh, Polly ——! Wherever are you? [Then, to herself.] Land sakes, that girl gets lazier every day! And them due in half an hour ——! Polly! [Giving it up, she returns to the table. But a queer thing has happened, for in the moment of her absence, a chubby arm shot out from under the table, groped about a minute, then grabbed the duster, which

was hanging down, and pulled it quickly underneath! Perceiving her duster gone, MRS. POMFUSS tries to repress a jump; again mutters, "Land sakes!" looks all over the table for it; and then starts, more sensibly, to raise the cloth and look under the table. But as she thinks of this, there is evidently a shiver down her spine, for she abruptly leaves the table altogether, and runs to the door, calling into the hall.] Polly! Come here at once! I want you ——!

[There being no answer, she flings one scared glance back at the room and then bolts, slamming the door behind her. And then, quite naturally, a gentle old lady, GRANDMOTHER ROCKER, precisely our idea of a grandmother, hobbles toward the table. I don't know whether she was in the Rocker all the time, and we did not see her; or whether she was inside it, or maybe behind it; but she belongs to the Rocker; or rather she is the Rocker, as you would know if you understood such things. And her dress,—old rose upholstery trimmed with fringe, is exactly like the Rocker. And the expression on her plump, faded pink cheeks shows she understands about the duster and intends to deal with it.

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[Hobbling toward the table.] You rogue! You naughty little rogue! [But her voice is no angrier than your grandmother's.] Come out of that this minute, or you shan't have a cooky for a week! [There is again the snigger, unmistakable this time, and the old lady, bending forward and raising the table-cover, pulls out the FOOTSTOOL BABY, a rosy

little fellow of three. He wears kilts, and he is so round that even without the brown rep ruffles, he curiously resembles the reddish-brown Footstool over by the Fireplace. He holds out the duster triumphantly. As she takes it from him, she goes on.] Yes, indeed, Granny sees it, and Granny's got it! Poor Mrs. Pomfuss! How often must I tell you not to play pranks,—and to-day especially,—when she's naturally upset!

[But he closes her mouth with kisses, and as she drops the duster back on the table, he shoves her toward the Rocker, on which, all the time murmuring "Dear me! Dear me! This will never do!" she sits down. And straightway he is in her lap, fumbling for cookies in her pocket. And while this has been occurring, the Great-Grandfather Clock strikes "Four" and—on my word!—no sooner has it finished than there steps from behind it—from within it—a delightful old gentleman, GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK. He wears doublet, hose, and a bright blue coat; and though his face is the dial of the Clock, round which grows a set of fluffy white whiskers, he speaks very clearly as he moves quickly, almost friskily, to the side of the Rocker.

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[To the old lady.] I always said you'd be like this, my dear! No discipline! No discipline! You told the baby yesterday not to get under the table when Mrs. Pomfuss was about, and then—[And he is right!] you feed him! Hoity-toity! One cooky—two cookies! How many more, I wonder! Now, in my young days——

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*Placidly cuddling the FOOTSTOOL BABY.*] Well, I must say, Father, if I can't give my own grandchild a cooky ——! Positively, you talk like one of these heartless modern mothers. I wouldn't have believed it!

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*Coming close and letting the BABY stroke his face.*] Well, I dare say you're right, my dear! He is a sweet child! But—[*Restlessly.*] we mustn't waste time! We mustn't waste time! Presently that tiresome Mrs. Pomfuss will be back again, and no telling but the giggling housemaid with her, and here we haven't formed our plans yet!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*A little uneasily.*] Well, they haven't arrived yet ——!

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

No, not yet! But they're due—I heard her say they're due in half an hour.

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*Rocking softly, the FOOTSTOOL BABY curled in her lap; I'm afraid he is sucking his thumb!*] Well, don't you go and get excited, Father dear! [*Rather wistfully.*] Like as not they won't come into this room the first day!

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*Wistfully, too.*] No, I suppose not! Though Mrs. Pomfuss was dusting like anything, and if they *should* come, our plans are not formed at all!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

Well, the great thing is not to get excited. Now I used to think Cousin Agatha—[*She points to the Horsehair Sofa.*] was the better for a little excitement. But you—you know if you're the least excited, you're liable to get *fast*, and then they'll simply send for the Clock-Mender and he'll ——

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*With a warning gesture.*] Hush ——! I can't bear it! That time last year—just because I was two hours fast ——! He took out all my insides ——! Of all the humiliating ——! I haven't felt right since!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*Touching his arm gently.*] There, there! Don't think of it! I'm sure old Mrs. Pomfuss won't do it again!

[*Barely has she finished than there is a rustle at the door, L., and in trips a young lady, LOUISA QUINZE, in little gilt slippers. She is so pretty, and has such silky yellow curls about her fluffy, gilt-trimmed dress, that we see at once she belongs to,—or is—the Louis Quinze chair, toward which she goes at once. She is obviously excited, and speaks in a pretty, high-pitched voice.*

LOUISA QUINZE.

[*As she enters.*] Old Mrs. Pomfuss will do worse than that! Much worse!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

Why, Louisa Quinze, what on earth do you mean?

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*With gloomy dignity.*] Speaking for myself, anything worse than the Clock-Mender is incredible!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*Anxiously, soothing the FOOTSTOOL BABY, who has begun to whimper.*] How do you know, Louisa? And where on earth have you been?

[*LOUISA QUINZE has now seated herself on the Louis Quinze, and has carefully spread out her fluffy gilt ruffles. But she looks as unhappy as anybody with such curls can.*

LOUISA QUINZE.

Well, I find it quite impossible to stay at home the way some of you do. Of course this room has never been the same to me since—since ——

[*She gives a small, heart-broken sniff, and stops.*

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*Gently.*] My dear, we appreciate your feelings, and honor you for them. But pray go on.

LOUISA QUINZE.

[*Resuming with effort, pride coming to her rescue.*] And not being so comfortably made as some—
[*Glancing at GRANDMOTHER ROCKER, who is rocking placidly, she gives her pretty head a toss.*] though of course I couldn't think of changing places ——

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*Under her breath.*] I should think not! Such very small feet must be really painful! [*To the FOOTSTOOL BABY.*] There, there, my precious! It's all right! Aunt Louisa's just a little upset!

LOUISA QUINZE.

[*Desperately.*] Oh, not a little! I'm terribly, terribly upset——!

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*In spite of himself, he frisks as he goes to her.*] My dear, I hope not! You might go over.

LOUISA QUINZE.

I see what you mean, sir, but it wouldn't much matter if I did. Except—— [*With an hysterical giggle.*] I suppose if I upset and broke, I wouldn't bring so much.

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*Turning quite pale.*] Louisa! What do you mean?

LOUISA QUINZE.

[*She loves, even in a painful story, to be the centre of attention.*] Well, I was out in the corridor, and I heard them—that wicked Mrs. Pomfuss and Polly the housemaid—talking. And Mrs. Pomfuss has sent for—has sent for—— [*But she simply can't finish!*]

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*Sternly.*] Whom has she sent for?

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*With a glance at the Armchair, as LOUISA QUINZE continues to sob; she is rocking violently.*] Oh, my rocker! I wish Henry were awake! He's the only one can do anything with Louisa when she's in these moods!

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*Touching his minute-hand.*] It's certainly time he woke up!

GRANDFATHER ARMCHAIR.

[*Through a yawn.*] I am awake! [*With another yawn.*] Very wide awake! [*With a tremendous yawn.*] I've been awake practically all the time.

[*But he has not yet become visible to the audience.*]

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*Tartly.*] Well, it's a mercy you found it out! [*Then, as an old gentleman with a high white stock emerges from somewhere about the Armchair—he must have had his nap deep in its cushions.*] Now, Son-in-law, you ask her.

GRANDFATHER ARMCHAIR.

[*Trying to concentrate;—though he is so much younger than GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK, he feels and acts older.*] Ask who—what?

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*With jeering briskness.*] Humph! I thought you said you'd been awake all the time, Henry!

GRANDFATHER ARMCHAIR.

[*As before, very slowly.*] I said—I'd been—awake—practically—all the time.

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*With a snort.*] Humph! Much you know about time! Young whippersnapper! "Practically all the time!" Now what earthly meaning is there in that? "Practically all the time!" No, no! Time

isn't practical. It's the most impractical thing in the world. Lovers—having a cosy time in the moon—over before they know it. And a toothache—lasts forever! No, no, time isn't at all practical. So how can it be “practically”? Eh? [*Then, disgustedly, with his idée fixe.*] And here am I—if I'm ahead a single minute —

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*She is always the peacemaker.*] Hush, Father dear! I'm sure you and Henry are both right! And certainly we all know that if one drops off a single second, everything important happens right then. I've often noticed it with myself when Henry's been reading me the newspaper—especially politics, you know. Of course it's no concern of women's, and yet even there he doesn't like it if I drop off for —

LOUISA QUINZE.

[*With dreary sarcasm.*] Go on talking. I wish I could. I wish I didn't know what I know.

GRANDFATHER ARMCHAIR.

[*Approaching her with determination.*] Out with it, girl.

LOUISA QUINZE.

[*Flinging herself into his arms.*] Oh, sir,—sir—Mrs. Pomfuss has sent for—the Auctioneer!

[*There is a moment of terrible silence, in which each takes in the full measure of the shock; for to these dear people “Auctioneer” is quite the most terrible word in the language. What the Work-House is to the poor; what the slave-block was to the slave, that, every inch of it, is the Auctioneer to*

them. And yet, in a moment, there is a brave attempt to rally.

GRANDFATHER ARMCHAIR.

[*Bravely, placing LOUISA gently on the Louis Quinze chair.*] Something must be done!

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*With nervous decision.*] How much time have we? That is the important thing, whether the rest of you know it or not! In this crisis time is the important thing! Now let me see—[*He presses his hand pathetically to his dial forehead.*] if I could go slow,—very slow—would it perhaps postpone his coming?

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*With tender firmness.*] No, Father dear, that is too much for you to attempt. Let me think ——

LOUISA QUINZE.

[*Mournfully.*] There isn't any time to think!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*For the first time, there is indignation in her gentle voice.*] Louisa! Did Mrs. Pomfuss say the Groom told her to send for the—the Auctioneer?

GRANDFATHER ARMCHAIR.

Oh, my castors and Pollux! A Groom couldn't be so wicked as that!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

Don't swear, Henry!

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

Might it have been the Bride, do you think, Louisa?

LOUISA QUINZE.

[*Faintly.*] It wasn't clear to me. I don't think she said! But I suppose it's the Bride—horrid, new-fangled things Brides are! I never could abide them!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*With a sign to her husband.*] Since her disappointment, Henry. The poor child cared so much she pretends she doesn't care at all. Sh——! [*As he attempts to address LOUISA.*] Let us not believe ill of the Bride! And say nothing to the children, Louisa! I'm thankful they were asleep!

[*But at a sudden sound from the Little Chairs, GRANDMOTHER ROCKER starts, with a muttered "Oh, mercy me!" And two little girls, the LITTLE CHAIR and the LITTLEST CHAIR, about five and six, wearing short straw-trimmed pinafores and pantalettes, looking extraordinarily like the two little wicker chairs from which they have been craning their necks the last few minutes, scamper toward their Grandmother.*

LITTLE CHAIR.

No, we weren't, Granny. We were wide awake all the time!

LITTLEST CHAIR.

[*As she speaks, she tweaks the old gentleman's coat-tails, which are a temptation.*] Much wider than Grandfather. Hee-hee——!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*As he turns upon them.*] Little eavesdroppers!

LITTLE CHAIR.

No, we didn't drop anything, Granny. Not a thing!

LITTLEST CHAIR.

And now we want a cooky.

GRANDFATHER ARMCHAIR.

[*Trying to be stern, after he has adjusted his up-holstered coat-tail.*] Cookies aren't for naughty children like you!

LITTLE CHAIR.

A peppermint'll do.

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

Peppermints indeed!

LITTLEST CHAIR.

Or a animal cracker!

LITTLE CHAIR.

Or a jackson-ball!

GRANDFATHER ARMCHAIR.

Did you ever hear such talk?

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*Backing him up.*] I should think not, indeed!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

They've grown that bold——! [*Then, as they snuggle about her, she helplessly begins to draw dainties out of her pocket, in which she is powerfully assisted, even the FOOTSTOOL BABY rousing for a nibble.*] Well, well, I suppose you must!

[*Cramming as much of the cookies and candy*

as they can into their mouths, they retire to their little chairs, where they seat themselves.

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*Impatiently*] What were we saying? Those children — [*With a dexterous movement.*] I believe I will have a jackson-ball — [*Then, to recover his dignity.*] I declare, they grow worse every day.

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*Suddenly breaking down.*] Don't, Father! Don't! Oh, to think of how soon they may be torn from us! All of the family scattered! [*Kissing the sleeping baby.*] Even the baby! Like their father and mother before them—three years ago! Oh—oh!

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*Brushing away a tear.*] Oh, please don't cry! It makes me cry to see you—and I can't keep time if I cry.

LOUISA QUINZE.

[*In violent hysterics.*] What difference does it make whether you keep time or not, when the Auctioneer —

LITTLE CHAIR, LITTLEST CHAIR, FOOTSTOOL BABY.

[*Their mouths full of cooky and jackson-balls, despairingly.*] Boo-hoo! Boo-hoo-hoo! Boo-hoo-hooo —!

[*They are all crying so loud that they do not hear steps in the passage. But as the door opens, and MRS. POMFUSS, accompanied by POLLY, a pretty girl in maid's uniform, enters*

the room, they jump up and scurry away, GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK stepping back into his frame; GRANDFATHER ARMCHAIR deep into his cushions, and GRANDMOTHER ROCKER, after she has deposited the FOOTSTOOL BABY on his footstool, retiring from view. But upon the talk that follows an occasional sniff and blubber may be heard, especially from behind the little chairs. Only LOUISA QUINZE still sits erect in her gilt chair, but she is very stiff and still, and seldom pays any attention to the conversation. The FOOTSTOOL BABY is again sound asleep.

MRS. POMFUSS.

Yes, I've been that flustered all day, you could knock me over with a feather!

POLLY.

[*Respectfully.*] It's a fact you was white as a sheet when you come down to the kitchen.

MRS. POMFUSS.

Well, it'd fair give *you* the creeps if one minute you'd had a duster in your hand, and the next —

POLLY.

[*Going to the table, and picking up the duster.*] Why, here it is, Mrs. Pomfuss! [*Beginning to laugh.*] I guess you need some bigger specs!

MRS. POMFUSS.

[*Regarding it suspiciously, and not touching it.*] Well, it wasn't there! It wasn't there! Not nohow!

POLLY.

[*Passing it vigorously over the Rocker; she seems not to hear a sudden gasp.*] Best to have 'em clean an' straight if the Auctioneer comes to-day!

MRS. POMFUSS.

[*Breathlessly.*] Well, I hope he don't come, Polly. I thought he'd have got here yesterday, or I'd never've sent. As if I didn't have enough on my mind already with them comin'——!

POLLY.

[*Sentimentally.*] To think of a bride's comin' here—an' me in the house!

MRS. POMFUSS.

[*Gloomily.*] Likely you won't be here long—nor me neither! Brides like a change—nothin' old suits. [*There is a wistful sigh from the old Rocker, but again the Housekeeper does not hear, going quickly on.*] Now all this truck in here—it should've been cleared out long ago, but as it wasn't—— [*A bell jangles through the house.*] Oh, mercy me, why didn't he come yesterday?

[*And she rushes out of the room*

POLLY.

[*Rapturously, to herself.*] Maybe it's her!

[*Then she, too, runs out.*

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*Softly, heard, but not seen.*] I can't believe that—what she said about Brides.

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*Stepping out cautiously.*] Hush, my dear! It's true, I make no doubt. She'll have us carted away at once, so she'll have more money to spend! [*Raising his voice.*] Oh, the ignominy! The ignominy!

LITTLEST CHAIR.

[*In a very small voice.*] What's ig-o-min-y?

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*Heard, but unseen.*] Nothing, my darling! Nothing! [*Then, as returning steps are heard.*] Oh, it can't be true! It can't be true!

LOUISA QUINZE.

[*Contemptuously, but without movement.*] Humph!

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*Slipping back into his frame, as a heavy tread approaches.*] It sounds like an Auctioneer!

[*And as the door is flung open, it is at once clear that the man MRS. POMFUSS and POLLY are ushering in is the AUCTIONEER. No other kind of a profession—not even a Butcher,—could make a man look quite so horrible as this. In a word, he is so bad I hardly like to describe him, for in case the night-light should go out, and you alone, I really couldn't be responsible! But if you still press me, and must know, he is like—an Ogre! But here—you can see for yourself,—if you dare look. And you can see how MRS. POMFUSS herself is so aware of it that she is very uncomfortable, and how*

POLLY, *as he comes blustering in, creeps close as she can, in MRS. POMFUSS' large shadow.*

AUCTIONEER.

[His voice is between an Ogre's and a Pirate's.] Well, I must say—I must say——! *[As he speaks, he stamps about amongst the furniture.]* One-penny—two-penny—*[He pronounces it "tuppeny."]* three-penny—— Damn——!

MRS. POMFUSS.

[Cowering.] Please, sir, not to swear—at least where there's ladies!

AUCTIONEER.

[Very insultingly.] I don't. One-penny. Tuppeny—three-penny—— Da——!

LOUISA QUINZE.

[Very distinctly, without change of expression.] Don't say that word again!

AUCTIONEER.

[Cheerfully, without finishing.] Oh, well, what's the diff? *[He turns to MRS. POMFUSS less unpleasantly.]* But you did have a nerve to bring me here!

MRS. POMFUSS.

[Plucking nervously at her dress.] I know there's not much, sir, but——

AUCTIONEER.

Don't say that, woman! There is much—*[With a sweep of his hand.]* a whole cartload. But it won't bring much. Do you understand?

MRS. POMFUSS.

[*Nervously.*] Yes, sir, I suppose so, sir! But it was very good furniture in its time, sir, and ——

AUCTIONEER.

[*Contemptuously striking the Sofa where the horse-hair is most out.*] In its time, yes, but when was its time? One-penny—tup —— [*But he stops as a majestic "One!" emanates from GREAT-GRAND-FATHER CLOCK.*] Um—not a bad old clock you've got there!

POLLY.

[*With a giggle.*] If it would keep time, sir, but what good's a clock that goes too fast, sir? Why, you can't depend on it at all, sir. One day a while ago they sent for the Clock-Mender, but ——

[*There is an angry snort from behind the Clock, but POLLY does not notice; what she does notice is a vigorous pinch from MRS. POMFUSS.*

AUCTIONEER.

[*Looking at POLLY.*] Continue, my dear, continue!—Don't pinch her arm, Mrs. P.! And always remember, my dear, you're talking to an Auctioneer! There's more poetry for you, but like as not you didn't hear, my dear! You're too pretty to be bright! Quite too ——

MRS. POMFUSS.

[*Bursting in indignantly.*] That clock ain't fast! It never was fast! [*There is a snort of satisfaction from behind the clock.*] It's the best clock in the world! It —— [*Then, as the door-bell rings.*] There! Sakes alive! It's them! Go down at once, Polly, and show them in the parlor—here! Wait a

minute —— [*As POLLY, delighted, is about to start.*] Oh, dear, I ought to go myself, I ought. What'll she think? Oh, mercy me —— [*As the bell rings again, louder this time, she turns to the AUCTIONEER despairingly.*] Whatever did you come for?

AUCTIONEER.

[*He is become completely the Ogre. Into the simplest words, he puts a hideous ferocity.*] To get it! To get it! To get it! Look at me? What do you suppose I eat?

MRS. POMFUSS.

[*With a gulp.*] I'm sure I don't know, sir!

AUCTIONEER.

[*Very terribly, to POLLY.*] What do you suppose I drink?

POLLY.

I—I—I ——

[*But she can't speak.*

[*Then, as the bell peals through the house the third time, and MRS. POMFUSS and POLLY, quite desperate, start to bolt, he grabs each by an arm, and shifts his weight from one foot to the other in a kind of weird dance, in which he is joined by both women.*

AUCTIONEER.

[*In a kind of chant, as all three dance slowly.*] Example 1—this morning —— One bed; one Morris-chair; one player-piano—for breakfast! Example 2—for lunch; a table, a chair—like that—[*Pointing to the Louis Quinze.*] and for dessert—a little chair, like that—[*Pointing to the LITTLEST CHAIR.*] juicy—sweet as sugar ——! [*As he pauses, there is a ter-*

rified yell from the LITTLEST CHAIR. Again, the unfortunate women try to flee, but he clutches them with a hand like an iron vise.] And to wash it all down with? [He looks ferociously from one to the other, still swaying slowly.] What kind of coffee? What kind of tea? What kind of wine? What——

[He stops short as the door gently opens, and before the astounded eyes of all three, there composedly enter, arm in arm, the BRIDE AND GROOM! As they come, we almost catch an echo of the Lohengrin music, "Here comes the Bride! Here comes the Bride!" but this may be imagination,—and one must be accurate. At any rate, there is no doubt about the swallow-tail and white waist-coat he wears, nor the silk hat he carries; nor that he is very, very handsome. And she—bless her!—oh, she is every inch a Bride! Little and shy in her gleaming white satin and long veil, her white-gloved hand on the GROOM'S arm, carrying, as she trips along in her tiny white slippers, a delicious, white-streamed nosegay, in which, from time to time, she buries her rosy face. Perhaps it is from smelling this so much—for changes come fast nowadays!—that her little nose turns up at just that delightful angle. At sight of MRS. POMFUSS and POLLY she smiles kindly, but as she takes in the AUCTIONEER, still holding them in such a grip, and the three still in their strange dance, she looks very astonished indeed.

BRIDE.

[Putting out her hand to MRS. POMFUSS, as the AUCTIONEER hurriedly lets go, dancing now only

with POLLY.] How do you do? You are Mrs. Pomfuss, aren't you? I hope we didn't startle you! We rang first—but it was such fun to use the latch-key! [*As MRS. POMFUSS courtesies desperately, all her planned speeches flown away in her extreme embarrassment.*] And this is Polly! How do you do, Polly? [*Again she puts out her hand, and the AUCTIONEER has to let go, the dancing stopped.*] And this—er—gentleman? [*As no one speaks, she turns to the GROOM.*] You never told me about him, Harry!

GROOM.

[*Also very surprised.*] Why, dearest, I never set eyes on the man before!

BRIDE.

[*With envious relief.*] Then he doesn't live here! [*Kindly, to the AUCTIONEER.*] I don't want to hurt your feelings, but really you know—er—— [*In the embarrassed silence, she turns again to MRS. POMFUSS.*] He's a friend of yours? [*Noting her blush.*] You're not—engaged to him?

AUCTIONEER.

[*Twirling his hat.*] Lor', no, Ma'am, beggin' your parding! Nor the other one neither—[*With a jerk toward POLLY.*] though not bad-lookin'! No, Ma'am, that there one—[*With a jerk at MRS. POMFUSS.*] the old one—sent for me.

[*As he pauses there is a gasp, a sigh, of expectancy, from the various corners of the old room. Does the BRIDE hear it? Before she speaks, she looks about; then speaks.*

BRIDE.

[*Gently.*] I see! [*To MRS. POMFUSS.*] What did you send for him for? And who is he?

MRS. POMFUSS.

[*Rubbing her hands together.*] Well, you see, Miss—I mean Mrs.—but you do look *so* young—! [*Turning to the GROOM.*] Oh, Mr. Harry, you done well for yourself, sir! She's a sight prettier'n even the picture you showed me!

GROOM.

[*Graciously.*] That's what I think, Mrs. Pomfuss! That's why I've brought her here to the old home! [*He turns to the BRIDE.*] I say, dearest, let's not hang round here any more! It's a gloomy kind of place, as you see! Everywhere else in the house there's new furniture, spick and span—! It's only this old room——

MRS. POMFUSS.

[*Scenting encouragement.*] Exactly, sir! That's why I sent for him!

[*With a jerk at the AUCTIONEER, who immediately begins to smack his lips.*]

BRIDE.

[*Dreamily.*] It's a nice old room! My—my husband's often told me about it, but it's so much nicer than he said. [*She looks half tenderly from one old piece to the other.*] I could be fond of these things! Why—— [*In soft wonder to herself.*] I think I'm getting fond of them already!

AUCTIONEER.

[*With a loud smack.*] So am I! Already! Already! [*He speaks fast and furiously.*] Take 'em

out now—right away—to-day ——! Have a man—waiting with a van ——! And then for dinner—ho, ho! let me see—let me see! [*As he wanders about the room, touching one thing after the other, as all look on, spellbound.*] The sofa and secretary to start with—and then, ah-ha!—the Armchair, and the Rocker,—ho-ho! The Rocker looks good, soft like sweet-breads ——! That'll taste good—my teeth ain't what they were—cracked 'em last week on a bit of old mahogany ——! And for dessert —— [*He pauses straight in front of the Footstool, in which the FOOTSTOOL BABY sits, still fast asleep.*] For dessert—ha-ha! Ho-ho! This fat little Footstool!

[*And he actually pokes it! But as the FOOTSTOOL BABY, roused suddenly, digs his fat little knuckles into his eyes and sets up a howl, the BRIDE darts forward, her voice quivering with righteous indignation.*

BRIDE.

How dare you touch that little Footstool? How dare you? How dare you?

GROOM.

[*Going over to her.*] Be careful, dearest! [*Hurriedly in a whisper.*] He's out of his head!

MRS. POMFUSS.

[*Despairingly, as the AUCTIONEER lowers ferociously.*] I never see such an Auctioneer!

BRIDE.

[*As if suddenly enlightened.*] Oh—he's an Auctioneer!

GROOM.

[*In a nervous whisper.*] But, dearest,—that doesn't explain ——! Good heavens, I never heard of an Auctioneer's dining off furniture!

MRS. POMFUSS.

[*Having overheard.*] Nor me, neither, sir,—that's a fact! [*To herself.*] Though there's more'n one queer thing happens in this room, if you ask *me*.

AUCTIONEER.

[*Suddenly controlling himself, his manner altering to one of cringing politeness.*] Yes, Bride, I'm an Auctioneer—at your service! And considering there's such a lot—I'll do my best to get you, for the lot of 'em—one hundred dollars.

GROOM.

[*Indignantly.*] One hundred! Why, that old clock alone cost ——

BRIDE.

Hush, Harry! [*Taking the arm of the AUCTIONEER she escorts him politely toward the door.*] Never mind, now, Mr. Auctioneer! Would you go down, please? [*As he hesitates, she continues persuasively, pointing down the corridor with her bouquet.*] Please, Mr. Auctioneer. You know they do anything for a Bride.

AUCTIONEER.

[*Grudgingly.*] Well—seein' you're a Bride ——

BRIDE.

[*With a meaning gesture.*] And Mrs. Pomfuss and Polly will see you out!

POLLY.

[*With a gasp.*] I'm sure I'd do anythin' for a Bride, Miss, but ——

MRS. POMFUSS.

[*Scared again.*] Perhaps if Mr. Harry was to come down, too ——

GROOM.

[*Aside to BRIDE.*] The man's certainly a bit strange, dear, but as the servants feel that way about it, and as long as he's here, hadn't I better talk to him down-stairs? We'd have more money for our honeymoon—if we should come to terms?

AUCTIONEER.

[*Briskly, overhearing the last words.*] Yes, Bride, let your new husband come down to the droring-room. I might do better than a hundred.

[*For a moment the BRIDE looks about the room slowly, her eyes taking in the furniture, piece by piece; and, if your ears are sharp, you may hear a little whisper,—“Dear Bride!” it comes, ever so faint, “Dear Bride!” but it can get no further. A moment passes; then she smiles back at the*

GROOM.

BRIDE.

Certainly, dear, I give you two minutes! But of course come back and tell me before you close with him!

GROOM.

[*Hesitating.*] It's for you, you know! Of course the fellow's a nuisance, but I'm not very rich, and a

bit more money would be more use to us than all this—er—truck.

AUCTIONEER.

[*Cheerily.*] That's what I say, young sir. One-penny—two-penny—three-penny—Da ——

BRIDE.

[*Hurriedly.*] Two minutes, Harry. [*They all go, and she waves them a gay good-bye. Then, alone, she looks again, searchingly, from piece to piece, as if trying to solve some puzzle. Then she sniffs at her nosegay, and, close beside the Louis Quinze chair, she thrusts the flowers straight into LOUISA'S face. And at the delightful smell LOUISA, who has been sitting still as a statue, suddenly comes to life again, smiles eagerly, first at the flowers, then at the BRIDE,—a wistful little smile. BRIDE, patting LOUISA'S shoulder,—though of course she never sees her, nor the others of the family.*] What a pretty chair! Why, I think it would be a perfect shame to —— [*She starts as LOUISA, with timid daring, breaks off an orange blossom from the bouquet.*] Why—I thought—something touched my nosegay!

LOUISA QUINZE.

[*In a quick gasp.*] I did! I was to have had orange blossoms once and a veil like yours, and then—a man like that horrible man down-stairs came and ——

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*Coming softly out, soothing LOUISA, as she speaks, quite naturally, to the BRIDE.*] Yes, it was a great disappointment. You can understand, my dear. She was engaged to be married to the Throne-

Chair. They had brought it from abroad—a most suitable match, we all thought, and then ——

GRANDFATHER ARMCHAIR.

[*Coming eagerly forward.*] He would have been my son-in-law. A great honor! A great honor! And then that horrible Auctioneer ——

LITTLE CHAIR.

[*Running over to the BRIDE.*] And he took our Papa!

LITTLEST CHAIR.

[*Scrambling out also, and running to the other side of the BRIDE.*] And our Mamma!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

They were such a happy couple! And how they loved the children!

BRIDE.

[*Softly, to herself.*] Why, it seems to me an Auctioneer is a terrible man!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*Eagerly.*] Yes, yes, my dear! You begin to understand, don't you? How it breaks up families! Even if it is an exaggeration about—er—eating us—it breaks up families! You won't let us go, will you? [*Clasping her hands.*] Oh, my dear, you won't let us go!

BRIDE.

[*Dreamily, her hand to her forehead.*] Such a lovely room—just as it is! It shouldn't be changed! It—oh—[*With a little yawn.*] how sleepy I am!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*Leading her gently to the Rocker.*] Here, my dear! Sit down and rest a moment! It's very comfortable!

BRIDE.

[*Sinking restfully back upon the cushions as GRANDMOTHER ROCKER smoothes her head softly, and starts the Rocker moving gently.*] What a lovely chair! Soft and gentle like—like—— [GRANDMOTHER ROCKER *leans forward and kisses her gently.*] Why, it's like a dear old lady——! Like—why, I know—like a grandmother! [*Dreamily holding out her arms.*] Now if only I had—if I only had—— [*And the FOOTSTOOL BABY, with a little run, climbs into her lap! She cuddles him, his head against her breast, his rosy little cheek gently covered by the wedding-veil; then, dreamily, she continues, her half-closed eyes on the little footstool.*] Why, it's almost like a baby,—that footstool. So fat and soft! They mustn't take him.

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*Frisking forward, as they stand, grouped about the dreaming BRIDE.*] Oh, my springs! I wish it was time to strike! But it isn't—it isn't! And when I get fast——

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

You mustn't do that, Father dear! They'll send for the Clock-Mender!

GREAT-GRANDFATHER CLOCK.

[*Rising on his toes in his excitement.*] I know! But she's going to sleep! [*Excitedly into her ear.*]

Wake up, Bride! It's two minutes! Don't you hear?

BRIDE.

[*Rousing herself a little.*] Why, it's time he was back!

[*She looks at the door and is about to rise and go to it when it opens and the GROOM comes in.*

GROOM.

[*Hurriedly.*] Well, he'll give us a thousand, he says — [*His voice suddenly changing, very tenderly, as if perceiving her for the first time.*] Why, my darling, how lovely you look, sitting there!

BRIDE.

[*Holding out her arms to him, as he comes swiftly toward her.*] Send him away, Harry! We don't want the money.

[*There is a low sigh of relief, and the FOOT-STOOL BABY rolls off the BRIDE's lap, and assisted by the LITTLEST CHAIR, toddles away to his footstool, on which he reseats himself.*

GROOM.

It would be convenient—living's high, you know.

BRIDE.

[*Softly.*] We don't want to break up families.

GROOM.

[*Startled.*] Break up families? Why, I don't know what you mean, dearest! Of course it's sad for a family if they don't want to sell, and have their things auctioned off, but in this case —

BRIDE.

[*Dreamily.*] I didn't mean that! These things—don't you think, Harry, don't you feel, they—I know it sounds funny, dear,—but they're sort of like a family—sometimes I think they *are* a family. They must have got so fond of each other, sitting here, year after year,—the old clock ticking off their time. [*She nestles close.*] Oh, Harry, tell that horrid man to go.

GROOM.

[*Gaily, as a door slams through the house.*] That's he now—gone! [*With a little laugh, he slips on his knees beside her, and, gathering her hands in his.*] I knew you didn't want me to sell, Sweetheart. I could see it in your eyes! So I told him not to wait but a minute!

BRIDE.

Oh, thank you!

LOUISA QUINZE.

Oh, thank you, thank you! The family will be so happy, and for myself——

BRIDE.

And another thing, Harry——

GROOM.

Anything, Sweetheart.

BRIDE.

Buy back all the old things that were sold here. There was a Chippendale——

LITTLE CHAIR AND LITTLEST CHAIR.

[*Breathlessly, rushing forward.*] Our Papa!

BRIDE.

[*Thoughtfully.*] And a Sheraton —

LITTLE CHAIR AND LITTLEST CHAIR.

[*In a squeal of delight.*] Our Mamma!

BRIDE.

[*Meditatively.*] And there was another—a throne-chair, I think.

GROOM.

[*Starting, as LOUISA jumps up in shy ecstasy.*] A throne-chair! And a Chippendale, and a Sheraton. But how on earth did you know? It was ages ago—I'd almost forgotten!

BRIDE.

[*Dreamily.*] I didn't know — [*Then, as the shadowy room is filled with the happy figures of them.*] Only—we must have the whole family back!

GROOM.

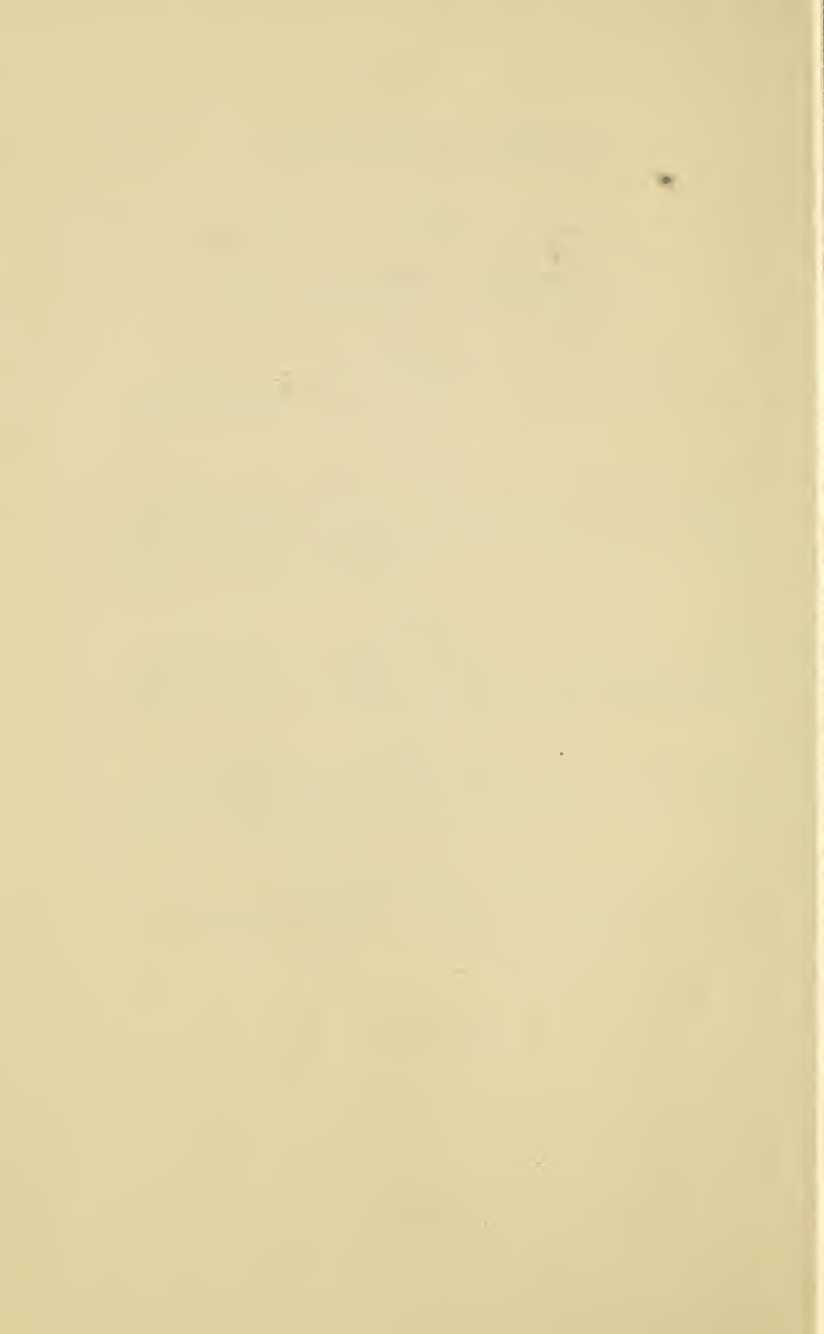
[*Looking about comfortably.*] It is a jolly old room! [*His arms suddenly fast about her.*] Oh, dearest, we're going to be so happy!

GRANDMOTHER ROCKER.

[*Coming close behind them, her hands gently up-raised.*] Dear Bride and Groom, God bless you!

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